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S E R M O N

House of LORDS,

T H E

Bishop of St. ASAPH's

S E R M O N

PREACHED before the

House of LORDS,

On Friday, February 16, 1759.

S E R M O N

House of LORDS

THE

Abbey Church of Westminster
MAY 25 1850

S E R M O N

House of LORDS

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S E R M O N

PREACHED before the

House of LORDS,

IN THE

Abbey Church of *Westminster*,On *Friday, February 16, 1759.*

Being the Day appointed, by

His MAJESTY'S Royal Proclamation,

FOR A

GENERAL FAST.

Drawn BYROBERT, Lord Bishop of St. *Asaph*.

L O N D O N :

Printed by JOHN HART, for
CHARLES BATHURST, in *Fleet-Street*.

MDCCLIX.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED before the

House of LORDS

Die Lunæ, 19^o Feb^{ri} 1759.

IN THE

ORDERED by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament Assembled; That the Thanks of this House be and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of St. *Asaph*, for the Sermon by him preached before this House in the Abbey Church, *Westminster*, on *Friday* last; and he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

Asbley Cowper, Cler' Parliamentor'.

without sufficient witness of his universal Providence over all the kingdoms of the earth. This

~~Government must be exercised in a manner~~

to his divine perfections: and though it may be better in many instances, as it is consistent with the free agency of man: yet according to the will of God, it must be

LAMENTATIONS I. 20.

*Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress;
my bowels are troubled; mine heart is
turned within me, for I have grie-
vously rebelled: abroad the sword be-
reaveth, at home there is as death.*

THE Prophet Jeremiah expresses in these words the agonies of the daughter of *Sion*, who had grievously sinned: there-
fore she was removed, and delivered into the hands of her enemies. The sword without, and terror within, as her Great Lawgiver had prophesied unto her, made her desolate and faint, for the multitude of her transgressions.

Lam. i. 8.

Deut. xxxii. 25.

The polity of the Jews was directed, for wise and gracious purposes, by the visible hand of the Almighty; who was their King, as well as their God: and their sins are therefore emphatically styled rebellion. The peculiar Providence of God over that highly favoured, but *fastidious and stubborn* people, doth not make an equal rule for other nations. Nevertheless, God hath not left himself without

Pf. lxxviii. 9.

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without sufficient witness of his universal Providence over all the kingdoms of the earth. This government must be exercised in a manner suitable to his divine perfections: and though it may be secret in many instances, as it is consistent with the free-agency of man; yet, agreeable to the Nature of God, it must be just.

The justice of the Almighty gives us reason to expect, that the prosperity and adversity of nations should, upon the whole, correspond to their virtue and vice: and the natural course of things, though carried on by men as instruments under the hand of Providence, marks out and vindicates this moral government of God over nations in this world.

II. xiv. 26, 27. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

Consider therefore, for it behoveth us to consider, how this purpose of the Almighty is executed.

We are called upon by Authority, in this time of war, to shew a just sense of our constant dependence upon our faithful Creator; to deprecate his anger, to implore his blessing and assistance, and to supplicate him, that he would restore and perpetuate peace, safety and prosperity to our King and Country.—If we were not called upon by Authority, every wise and good man, who discerneth

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cerneth the times, would of himself be led into many serious reflections.

The uncertain issues of war lay a peculiar weight upon our minds. The duty we owe to our King and Country, and the preservation of our just rights may lead us into war; and it may be even attended with some success: but yet it is always a state of danger, perplexity and sorrow to every nation. The happiness of our situation hath indeed separated us in a great measure from its immediate horror and desolation: but on the other hand, the burthen lies heavier upon this, than upon any other nation. The rank this nation holds in the scale of power in *Europe*; the Liberty, the Commerce, the Religion it enjoys, create an envy and enmity in others, beyond what is merely actuated by the thirst of glory and dominion: an expence of blood and treasure is laid upon us far above our natural strength: and whenever we enter into war, the very existence of our Constitution is in danger. Our stake is great, and it is all in the balance.—Not that war, in some circumstances, can, or ought to be avoided: but in all circumstances, it ought to make us think soberly; it ought to make us bring our national state and condition home to our own bosoms; that we may look through the semblance of things, and find out what is really the source of national strength, honor and tranquillity.

Whilst all, that is valuable, hangs thus in doubt upon

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upon the events of war; if we should perceive symptoms of decay at home from the overflows of Vice; the terrors would become infinitely more alarming. But be they ever so alarming; as men and Christians, we are not to lie down and despair; we are not to lose ourselves in weeping and wailing: but to *gird up the loins of our mind; to search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord*, by cultivating those virtues, which give strength and comfort to the soul of man; and whose influence renders a nation quiet and flourishing at home, powerful and respectable abroad.

It becometh well the just to humble their souls before Almighty God with Fasting and Prayer: but how vainly shall we supplicate Him for mercy, defence and assistance; if our *guiltiness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away?* — That we may be consistent and uniform in our whole duty: that we may carry our present resolutions into constant practice, and reap the due effect of sincere supplications; that We may make this *an acceptable day to the Lord*, and profitable to our Country: let us, each of us, *commune with our own heart*: let us *prove our own selves*, and examine, *without partiality and without hypocrisy*, how far our own conduct, according to our respective stations, powers and opportunities, may contribute to the public order or disorder. Consult your own reflection and experience: they will represent to every considerate mind, how the essentials of a community are affected by the natural effects of Religion and Irreligion upon the minds of

1 Pet i. 13.

Lam. iii. 40.

Nos. vi. 4.

Is. lviii. 5.

Pf. iv. 4.

2 Cor. xiii. 5.

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of individuals.——This is indeed a most obvious and trite, but it is a most useful, plain and important truth. We may be soon bewildered and deceived, if we presume to specify, what we may think God ought to do; but we cannot easily err in considering *what manner of persons we ought to be.* Such knowledge we can attain to: and to act in consequence of it will be *our wisdom* 2 Pet. iii. 11. *and our understanding in the sight of all nations.* Deut. iv. 6.

It is the great design of Religion to reform our evil habits, to restrain and direct our appetites and passions, to raise our ambition above the vicious pursuits and follies of this world, to temper and strengthen our hearts and minds, and to carry us through every part of duty in our respective stations with cheerfulness and constancy. The Christian Religion is a system of principles tending to this end: and adds the most powerful motives to support men in every instance of right and truth. Has either experience or theory, in any age or country, found out any other means so effectual to maintain the strength and order of a nation? Public spirit, or honor, or fear will hardly secure obedience; nor will riches or power produce stability, except the foundation is laid in virtue. Vicious nations may indeed seem to be in full affluence and power, but their prosperity is only for a time: whilst the latent poison of sin is circulating in the different veins, enervating the vigor and corrupting the essentials of the constitution. Vicious individuals may sometimes do great and serviceable actions for the public good;

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upon motives, independent of any moral consideration. This may happen in particular instances, and does not impeach the general truth: but without stopping to unravel such cases; our reflections will be more just and clear, more extensive and more useful; if we trace out, in general, how the principles of Virtue and Vice spread through the great mass of a people; and thereby support or undermine the constitutional powers of a state.

Principles in their source belong only to individuals; yet they will ever in their consequences greatly affect the strength, order and stability of the nation. The general temper and conduct of a nation doth not arise so much from the excellency of the constitution, or the wisdom of the legislature, as from the principles of the inhabitants: and the state owes it's safety or it's ruin to the combined virtue or depravity of individuals. — Look over the generality of mankind: you see the dispositions of men towards the public formed, at least influenced and strengthened, by their moral character. Interest or passion or convenience may lead a man into particular schemes occasionally; but will not, either make him see things in a large view, or produce steadiness of action: they will hardly guard a man even against the shiftings and inconsistencies of his own mind. Uniformity of conduct depends upon the right or wrong bent of the whole heart: which will give way to some motive or other; and therefore should be early stablished and settled in right and great prin-

principles. Otherwise you see men fall a prey to their own weakness or wickedness; or to the seduction of those, who lie in wait to avail themselves of the vices and follies of their fellow-creatures. To prevent these evils, Religion gives her aid, where law is unavoidably deficient: the sanctions of human government cannot reach the inward man; it is Religion only that can secure the heart.

Observe the operation of principles and the habits arising from them in fact.—Every serious and accurate observer of mankind will be able to trace out the disregard of the plain duties to God and man; producing by degrees a neglect or perversion of education, and a corruption of opinions and manners, which relaxes every nerve of government, and tends to its dissolution. A wise man will not place Religion in the means, nor will he pretend to support it without them. He will see clearly the obligation men are under not to contemn or lay aside the worship of God, and the reverence due to his Sabbath. Custom and fancy will never make the omission of it lawful: and it will still be sin; and produce to the public the effects of sin; though it may, too often, have the impunity and encouragement of innocence. Consult your own heart; and it will tell you, how religious habits nourish and support religious principles, from whence they rose. Consider what passes around you in the world; and you will perceive, how the want of them is more particularly felt and marked in a land of commerce

If. lxx. 16.
Eccl. ix. 2.

and freedom.—Hence dissipation, dissoluteness and prophaneness spread wide; the honour due unto the name of the most High is set at nought; and men enter coolly into a determined scheme of the most shocking Perjury, without check of shame or remorse. When he, that *swureth by the God of truth, feareth not an oath*; the great barriers of trust and confidence in society are laid waste: all the foundations of credit and compacts are out of course; and an inroad is opened to every species of villainy, that can endanger the lives and properties of mankind.

Rom. xiv. 7.

From whence cometh a want of due subordination in public and private life, and every selfish and profligate pursuit; but from a failure in the main foundations of religious principles: which enjoin a man to fulfill his several obligations according to his station? Religion tells us that *none of us liveth to himself*; but that we should do all things for the honor of God and the good of mankind; which are coincident. Vice, on the contrary, bids a man live to himself alone: and under this influence, the different connexions and ties of life are loosened and broken; the desires, the notions, the objects of men are changed and perverted; even appetites, that seem to be contradictory, become consistent; men grow profuse and rapacious; eager of gain and yet priding themselves in extravagance; eating the bread of thousands; and at the same time working out their own ruin. All restraints and obligations, all sentiments of virtue and honor, and even decency are de-

despised and discountenanced. Every man's strength or acuteness is the law of his justice, Wisd. ii. 11. and truth: and when a man hath once corrupted all honest and generous affections in his own mind, he will probably try to check them in others, or to sully their reputation; by casting a malicious gloss upon every action, and employing every engine of calumny: that pestilence that walketh in Pf. xci. 6. darkness, to destroy the fame and quiet and well-being of mankind. No regard is preserved to character or station; no respect to order or government; or even to the essentials of Liberty, under whose banner detraction presumes to appear: but every man, that pleaseth, throws about slander and defamation; as a mad man casteth fire-brands, Prov. xxvi. 18, 19, arrows and death; and hath not even the excuse to say, am not I in sport?

When vice prevails in private life; cancelling the obligations and dissolving the foundations of social duties: what can the Country expect, but to be a spoil to the various passions and appetites of her unnatural children? The Public in its honor, credit and strength, at home and abroad, feels the effects of the conduct of individuals in every branch of business, of trade and manufactures. The Country is drove into distress and expence by their passions; and that expence and distress exceed the due proportion by their craving appetites. Vice communicates itself through all ranks; by imitation, by seduction, by eagerness, by idleness; by all the different motives, that fall in with the different tempers and pursuits of men.

Men.

Jer. iv. 22.
Jer. ix. 5.

Men grow *wise to do evil, and weary themselves to commit iniquity*. The public good is far out of their sight: private jealousy, distrust, envy, resentment put forth their full influence, and bring the whole into danger: and that danger doth not arise so much from the division of opinions, as from the motives of those opinions. When the motives of the heart are contracted, no enlarged way of thinking or acting for the good of the Country, can spring from such a heart; and all the professions of public spirit carry little weight or credit with them. The forwardness, to *despise government and speak evil of dignities*, will encrease continually: not from that love of liberty, which prompts men sometimes to shake off unconstitutional power; but from that impatience of vice, which always spurns at all just authority. And from this same source, daily appearances will occur of self-sufficiency, presumption, confusion, cowardice and cruelties, unheard of in other times.——These symptoms, too often, unhappily cause dejection and silence in many good men, indolence in the mild and well-meaning, and activity in the abandoned. Restless ambition or avarice pushes some on with indefatigable intrigue and confidence; whilst others abuse their time, their understandings and their hearts in an idle circle of insensibility and luxury. And the body of the people seduced, depraved and void of every sober principle, neither shew sense enough to discern the danger, nor integrity enough to stop the causes or progress of it. Thus Licentiousness, supported by sloth on one side, and delusion on the
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the other, and attended by a train of gay heedless passions, leads on her blind votaries; who, fond of their captivity, with a rash thoughtlessness run headlong into their destruction. — Say not, this love of independence and disorder is the genuine offspring of liberty and commerce; for it is a reproach to both, and must bring on their ruin. Commerce cannot long have the balance in its favor but by righteous dealing: and true Liberty can only consist with those restraints, which pure religion and good government lay upon mankind.

In such a State, where the overflowings of vice have weakened the essentials of government, where will be the hopes of recovery from the Legislative or Executive power of the nation? — Laws may be multiplied. — Men always complain against multiplicity of laws: But surely it is not so much a grievance to a people, as the sign of a declining people. And how is the observance of human laws secured, when there is no regard paid to divine? Where the body of the people is not corrupted, tumults and disorders seldom do much hurt; and where it is corrupted, good laws seldom do much good. Law may curb vice when it comes into action: but the hidden workings of vice, which lead to the decay of a nation, are often out of the power of Law at the beginning; and in the end, by evasion or corruption, or perhaps violence, render it of none effect. — Punishment may be more frequent, — but that too, by its frequency, loses its due terror. Imprisonment

ment and correction accomplish, instead of re-
forming, the novice in villainy; and Executions
harden, instead of awakening, the corrupt multi-
tude.

Religion, humanity, prudence, policy and ex-
perience will lead men to think of other re-
medies: they will prompt men to promote prin-
ciples and habits of piety, truth and justice; of
generosity, candor and humbleness of mind; of
temperance, frugality, and industry, through the
different ranks of life. These are the most likely
means to prepare the minds of the people for the
due observance of law; to lessen the frequency,
and strengthen the effect, of punishment; to estab-
lish concord and regularity, and affection for
good government; and to contribute to the in-
crease, the employment and the morals of the
people: which are the real sources of public wel-
fare. The most judicious means of policy are of
imperceptible and slow growth, but certain effect:
and those which prevent the breach of public
duty, by the influence of right education and true
religion, are built upon the most solid foundations,
the largest views and the most desirable motives:
for they make private coincide with public, pre-
sent with future happiness. Not that virtue will
operate with equal strength to restore a corrupt,
as to invigorate a rising nation: but it will do
more than any other means, to counteract the
changes, that time and circumstances bring into
the wisest and most salutary systems. A constitu-
tion is seldom brought back to its first principles,
but

but by the appearance and exercise of some great virtues; or by some great adversity, which is the school of virtue. A virtuous nation may reform disorders; a vicious one falls a sacrifice to them. Nor can any accidental temporary access of power or wealth effectually repair the breaches, or controul the torrent of various evils, that must overwhelm a nation, if it remains under the dominion of sin.

This constant course of things corresponds to the justice of God's Providence; and is in general the visible exercise of it, over all the kingdoms of the earth. — It would be happy, if we could not find a present example, to confirm these truths in their fatal effects: but it is to be feared, that the example is too nigh. This age may be said not to be worse than the former: this nation may not be more corrupt than another: calamities may not be more particularly to be feared in this, than in times past. This may be true: but yet we cannot flatter ourselves much in this regard. Vice has every thing to fear in every time: the fulness of vice will in its nature have its crisis: and the justice of God will vindicate itself in every nation.

It is obvious to every one's observation, that there are ages of nations as well as men, though the progress is made by gentler steps: and the life of a man is in smaller proportions the copy of
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that of a nation.——From rude unpolished beginnings, amidst many ~~justings~~ and hard struggles, through labor and discipline, he attains by degrees to his full strength and perfection: from which point he begins again gradually to decline, and dwindles insensibly into age: he finds his friends drop off from him, his wants and distresses multiply, and his vigor continually diminish; and under this load of decay, he drags on a distempered body; till either some sudden shock throws him into the grave, or he sinks of himself under his own weakness and corruption.——This, in general, is the fate of every man and every nation: but it is equally incumbent upon men, in their public as well as their private capacity, not to precipitate their ruin.——There are particular tendencies in some political constitutions, which make them more liable to dissolution than others: in some, the effect of virtue and vice are more manifest, and the operation quicker than in others: and in the best practicable system, there may be the properest checks against the passions of men, working in the different parts; but at the same time there is the greatest liberty for the passions to shew themselves: and therefore there is the greatest necessity to model them for the benefit of the whole. The great principles of pure religion and free government, are peculiarly adapted and conformed to each other; live and decay together; and in such a polity more particularly it is the heighth of folly to weaken the bands of order and
cut

cut the sinews of authority, by neglecting or corrupting those principles; which alone make governors rule *prudently with a faithful and true heart*, Pf. lxxviii. and render the governed easy, ready and stedfast in ^{72.} their obedience for the public good.

This Kingdom, that was great among the nations—*Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction, and of her miseries, all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old.*—This Kingdom had her Constitution founded in virtue: therefore was her strength and her glory great. Our Constitution has had its failures repaired, and its wounds bound up; it has been preserved and improved by the power of virtue: and even at this day stands unimpaired by any hand, but that of vice. We enjoy, under the mildest Government, every civil and religious blessing, that can give constant vigor and full effect to virtue: but do we improve the purity and strength of our hearts, in proportion to these blessings? If we do not, how just will be *our reproach, our shame, and* Pf. lxxix. 19. *our dishonor.* Shall we try to get rid of our principles, and foolishly call it getting rid of our prejudices? If we are wise only as far as this world goes, is there any steady light to guide a man through the *crooked paths*, that he makes unto H. lix. 8. himself? If we set at nought the solid principles of Religion, is there any conduct to be depended upon? Is there in private life, any fidelity, friendship or affection to be expected? In public life,

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any consistency, strength or authority to be maintained? Is there any security against every evil way, and every desperate change? Does not the cement, the life, the defence of all, that we ought to hold most dear, depend upon integrity and uprightness? And will not the want of those virtues, which constitute the strength of our souls, tend to produce those calamities, which will bring us to the severest trial. — Let us not follow the consequences too far: but let them at least fix this truth in our minds; that public and private happiness arise only from the soundness of the heart.

- Rom. xiii. 11. *Knowing therefore the time, that now it is high time to awake* out of this languor and supineness towards the publick good; with which vice possesses the spirits of men, and intoxicates them: let us take the paths of virtue and honor, which lie open before us. Let the sincerity of our present prayers and contrition give a new cast and color to our whole heart and desires. Every man may in some degree endeavour to promote public
- Prov. iv. 23. *virtue, power and safety; keep his own heart with all diligence;* and according to his station, by his attention, example and authority contribute to the observance and encouragement of right and truth,
- Rom. xiv. 19. *and all the things which make for peace and strength* in a nation. Personal virtue will diffuse itself in its general effects, and is the only means to fortify the minds of men; to stop the torrent of licentiousness.

centiousness and profligacy; to support the essentials of liberty, and the just notions of obedience; and to repair the foundations of public order.

In the designs of Providence, in the progress of science, arts, religion, liberty, power through the different kingdoms of the earth, there may be intricacies past our finding out. In the general overflowings of national calamities, there may be difficulties with regard to particulars, which we shall never fathom. In the doubtful issues of war, success doth not always correspond to superiority of wisdom and power; nor doth it even determine the justice of a cause, or the stability of a nation. *These secret things belong unto the Lord our God:* Deut. xxix. but all events may be turned to good by the force²⁹ of religion and virtue. It is our business to act upon what we can know; under a constant sense, *that the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men,* Dan. iv. 25. *and giveth it to whomsoever he will:* and if we desire to find a basis to our public and private conduct, there can be none truer and firmer, than that God is just, and that obedience to his laws is the most lasting means of establishing the national welfare, honor and glory; and undoubtedly secures the peace of men's souls here and hereafter.

It behoveth us therefore, to discern the manners and temper of the people: to attend to the di-

Ex. xv. 23.

distempers and conjunctures of the times, whilst we feel the effects of our vices at home, and are subject to the changes and chances of a just and necessary war abroad. It behoveth us to trace back those *waters of bitterness*, which we now taste, to their real source, the want of religious principles: to find out, to procure, to pursue the remedy; not by formal acts and declarations only, but by the uniform sincere practice and promoting of piety and virtue in every path of life. It behoveth us to accustom ourselves to self-government, which will keep up our social affections: not to satisfy ourselves with This Day's solemn and due humiliation before the Throne of Mercy, but to make it the beginning of a new life of self-examination, repentance and amendment: to bring all our thoughts and actions to the test of the great principles of pure religion; to strengthen our resolutions by habits of righteousness; and whether we are distressed with war or blessed with peace, to fulfil our public obligations with uprightness, firmness and joy.

Jam. iv. 14.

The event is in the breast of the Almighty. Empires and principalities and powers are even *vapors, that appear for a little time, and then vanish away*. All is fluctuating here: and thro' the various course of human contingencies, we are taught to look beyond this world for an Everlasting Kingdom. We have seen the justice of God stamped upon the fate of all nations: we know that

that the national effects of virtue and vice are unalterably fixt in the constitution of things. *The Micah vi. 8.*

Lord hath shewed us what is good: He hath in his works and in his word instructed and admonished us; but he will only instruct and admonish us: it lies upon us to work out our own salvation with Phil. ii. 12. fear and trembling.

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Good parts, however, is good: His soul in his
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